**Competency-based interview questions**

**PERSONAL ABILITIES**

**PERSONAL MATURITY.** Is secure, stable and self-aware. Sees relationships in their proper perspective, distinguishes the personal from the professional. Behaves in a manner adapted to the situation.

*Evaluated best by what the applicant conveys in the interview situation and by the interviewer taking a position on the applicant's emotional stability, ability to see their role in different situations and ability to relate to and reflect on things in an adequate manner.*

**INTEGRITY.** Has well-founded and clear values and an ability to think conceptually on issues from an ethical perspective. Is governed by ethics and values in critical situations at work.

– What do ethics mean to you? Is there an ethical issue that is particularly important in your professional practice? How do you relate to it? How does it affect your way of acting? Can you give an example?

– Are there other values that are important? How do you reason there?

– Can you tell us about a situation when your values influenced your way of acting? What was it about? What did you do? What results did it lead to?

– Can you tell us about another such situation when your values influenced your way of acting, and you had to go against the expectations of others? What was it about? What was expected of you? What did you do? What made you act that way? Why was it important in this situation? What did it lead to?

– Have you ever had to sacrifice or risk anything in order to maintain your ethics or your values? What was it about? What did it lead to? How do you view it now afterwards?

– Have you ever had to compromise your ethics or your values? What was it about? How did you choose to act in that situation? What did it lead to? How do you view it afterwards?

*Note the clarity of the applicant's thoughts and whether the applicant has the ability to move from concrete to abstract and from abstract to concrete. Evaluate whether the applicant has adapted his/her actions according to ethics and values and whether there are concrete indications that the applicant is prepared to sacrifice something to maintain them.*

**INDEPENDENCE.** Has the courage to act according to his/her own convictions.

– Have you ever been convinced of something, even though others saw it differently? What was it about? What did you do? How did it go?

– Have you ever pushed an issue even though your boss thought differently? What was it about? What did you do? What made you act that way? What did it lead to?

– Have you ever avoided taking action, even though you thought others were wrong? Tell us about that situation. What was it that held you back? How did it go? How do you think about it afterwards?

*Note whether the applicant acted in accordance with his/her beliefs in a way that goes beyond fulfilling regular duties, and if the person showed courage to act even when there is something at stake for him or her personally.*

**INITIATIVE.** Takes initiative, initiates activities and achieves results.

– Do you usually push to make things happen or do you take it a little easier? Tell us about a time when you've pushed matters. What was it about? What did you do? How did it go?

– Tell us about a difficult problem you had to solve. What were the circumstances? What did you do? What was good about your way of dealing with the situation? What could have been better?

– Have you ever taken initiatives beyond the ordinary? Tell us about such a time! How did it go? What feedback did you get from others?

*As with "personal maturity", this competence can often be evaluated in conjunction with other competencies, but the above questions complement when you have not received enough information in any other way. Note the extent to which the applicant describes his or her own initiatives, particularly initiatives that go beyond what is only part of performing their basic work or fulfilling normal expectations. Be sure to note what the applicant him- or herself is doing, not what the team does. Assess whether the initiatives are appropriate in the context of what they are trying to achieve and whether they lead to the desired results.*

**SELF-STARTER.** Takes responsibility for his/her work. Is structured in his or her approach and drives processes further.

– What are your responsibilities or commitments in your work? How do you relate to this? How much do you think you should check about, ask or report to be able to push your issues further? Can you describe a concrete example?

– Describe a major task you were responsible for. What was it about? What were the circumstances? How did you proceed? What was the biggest problem? How did you solve it? How did it go? Is this typical for you? Can you give another example?

– Have you ever started something that was not finished? What was it? What happened? What made it go as it did?

*Note whether the applicant takes or refuses responsibility and if there is a certainty that the applicant does not need to check about more than is deemed necessary. Also note whether there are concrete indications of the ability to independently structure a task and achieve results and what complexity the task in that case had.*

**FLEXIBLE.** Can easily adapt to changing circumstances. Can quickly change approach and attitude. Sees the possibilities in change.

– Have you had to go through any major changes in connection with your work? How did it feel? How did you handle it? What guided your way to act?

– Describe a change that you perceived as negative. What made you not think it was good? How did you handle it?

– Tell us about an occasion when you had to change your view or approach radically. How did you react? How did you make the change? Are you satisfied with the results?

*Note whether the applicant has been in a changing environment and has been challenged in terms of competence, or if the changes fall within the scope of what you have to expect in all activities. Positive ratings are made if the applicant gives examples of good adaptation and proactive behaviour that led to good results and the applicant spontaneously expresses a constructive attitude.*

**STABLE.** Is calm, stable and controlled in stressful situations. Maintains a realistic perspective on situations and focuses on the right things.

– In what way is your current work stressful? When is it at its worst? How did you handle it the last time it happened? How did it go?

– Has it ever happened that everything got bogged down? Why did it happen? What did you do then? Is it typical for you?

– Tell us about when you last had a lot to do. How did you feel? How do you prioritise between different tasks? How did it go?

– What is the most pressing situation you have been in? How did you react? What did you do? What did it lead to? How did you feel?

*Note whether the applicant has been in stressful situations beyond the ordinary and if so, if it was for shorter or longer periods, as this may affect the energy level. Positive ratings are made if the applicant gives examples of good adaptation and proactive behaviour that led to good results and the applicant spontaneously expresses a constructive attitude.*

**ACHIEVEMENT-ORIENTED.** Sets high goals for him- or herself and works hard to achieve them. Is job-focused and actively seeks challenges. The work results in personal satisfaction.

– Tell us about a goal you set for yourself. For your team/unit/organisation. Do you think the goals are cautious or ambitious? Is it typical for you?

– What is your greatest challenge right now? How did you take it on? What results did you achieve?

– How do you try to evolve and learn new things? What are you doing concretely? Is there anything else you would like to develop but are not? What is stopping you?

– What do you want to achieve in your work or career? What is your time perspective? What do you do to get there? What do you sacrifice to get there? What are you not prepared to sacrifice? How do you ensure that there is a balance here? Has it ever been a problem to keep that balance? What happened? What did you do? What did it lead to?

Note the high goals that the person has, the time perspective that the person is working with and the extent to which he or she is actively working to achieve them. High goals and long-term perspectives are given higher ratings, provided that there is a reasonable consideration of the balance between the requirements of different areas of life. The goals need not be formulated in career terms, but may as well be about the results sought and the interviewer should be vigilant about the driving forces behind the achievement orientation.

**ENERGETIC.** Has the ability to work hard and devote time, energy and commitment to their work.

– How many hours did you work last week? Is this typical for you? What do you generally think about your workload? Are the requirements imposed on you reasonable?

– Tell us about a situation when you have had to give a little extra. What was this due to? What did you do? How did it feel?

*Note whether the applicant has been in particularly pressing situations and whether this was for long periods, as such experiences can reduce the applicant's energy. Positive estimates are made if the applicant gives examples of engagement beyond the usual during periods and if the person has a positive attitude to this. Also note how the applicant describes work situations in other contexts, especially if the person conveys a genuine interest in and commitment to their work.*

**TENACIOUS.** Remains motivated and effective despite setbacks and disappointments. Works on until projects are completed or results achieved.

– Tell us about something that has made you very disappointed. What did you think when it happened? How did you act? How did it go afterwards?

– Have you ever been criticised or questioned at work? What was it about? Who expressed this to you? What was your response? What did it lead to?

– Have you ever lost your drive? What happened? How did you handle it? Have you ever turned a defeat to a success? What had happened? What did you do? What made you act that way? How did it go?

*Positive ratings are made when the applicant can give concrete examples of constructive behaviour that leads to positive results in connection with disappointments and being called into question. The rating should be proportional to the extent of the setbacks, how proactive the applicant was and the results achieved.*

**SOCIAL SKILLS**

**ABILITY TO COOPERATE.** Works well with other people. Relates to them in a sensitive and flexible manner. Listens, communicates and resolves conflicts in a constructive way.

– In what way are you dependent on each other in your team today? How do you cooperate? How does this feel? What is your role in the group? Why do you think you were given that role? What do you think about it? What feedback have you gotten on your way of working with others?

– Do you do anything to promote the group or improve relationships? What do you do? What response have you gotten? Is there anything you should do that you don’t do? Why don't you do it?

– Tell us about a situation when relationships have ended. What happened? What did you do? How did it turn out?

– Have you ever had to interact with someone you perceived to be difficult to cooperate with (colleague, customer or similar)? Tell us about that situation. What made it difficult? How did you handle it? Can you give an example? How did it go?

*Positive ratings are based partly on the conduct during the interview, if the person has a positive and responsive attitude, listens and is receptive and is perceived as open and accommodating. They are also based on an awareness of workplace relations and the concrete, positive steps that the person takes to strengthen them as well as constructive conflict management.*

**CREATES RELATIONSHIPS.** Is outgoing and socially active in professional contexts. Makes contacts and maintains relationships.

– What kind of relationships and contacts do you have with others outside the team? How do you maintain/care for them? How does it go? What gives you the most? What gives you the least?

– How do you use your network to achieve your goals? Tell us about such a situation. What were the circumstances? What did you do? How did it go?

– Tell us about a situation when you needed to create new contacts. How did you go about it? How did it go?

– Have you ever had to create new contacts, but found it difficult? Tell us about it. What made it difficult? What did you do? How did it turn out?

*Positive ratings are based on experience of situations where this has been prominent and has required a proactive behaviour that the person maintained and which led to desired results.*

**EMPATHY.** Has the ability to take on someone else's perspective or situation without taking on the person's emotions.

– Tell us about a situation when you have had to deal with a person who has gone through something difficult. What happened? What was your role? What did you do? How did you feel? What did it lead to?

– Have you ever met someone in an emergency situation or someone who has just been very upset? What had happened? What did the person do? What did you do? How did it affect you? How did it go afterwards?

– Has it happened that someone told you something that was important to that person – something that was hard for you to hear? What was it about? How did you handle it? How did it go?

*Positive ratings are based in part on the conduct during the interview, if the person is perceived as responsive and capable of listening. They are also based on concrete indications of the ability to be available and present for someone else's needs and to be able to put aside their own perspective, without losing sight of it.*

**ORAL COMMUNICATION.** Speaks clearly, well-formulated and with engagement in individual meetings and small and large groups. Listens and is receptive to the respondent and adapts to the situation.

– In what situations do you need to make presentations? How large an audience do you usually have? Are they internal or external? How do you experience these situations? Tell us about a recent presentation you held. Take me there. What did you try to achieve? What could have been better? What response did you get?

– In what situations at work do you need to convince or influence others? Describe when you last managed to convince someone about something that was important to you. How did you go about it? Is this what you usually do when you try to influence others?

– When did you last try to affect a group in a particular issue? Take me there (what did it concern? what did you do?). How did it go?

*Positive ratings are based on how the applicant communicates in the interview situation, especially if he or she is well-formulated and engaging to listen to, if the person listens and responds to the interviewer adequately, adapts his or her communication to different contexts and whether he or she achieved good results in connection with larger presentations.*

**LOYAL.** Expresses a positive attitude towards his/her work, the activities and/or the organisation. Acts in accordance with the decisions made, the operating plan, objectives, policies and guidelines. Takes up criticism only in the correct context or directly with the parties concerned or the superior.

– Have you ever thought it was difficult to follow a decision made in the management team or higher in the organisation? Tell us about that situation. What did you do? How did it go?

– Have you ever felt that you needed to drive a question even though your boss had a different viewpoint? What was it about? What did you do? What did it lead to?

– Have you ever felt that you needed to fight for something in your working life? What was it? How did you act? What happened?

*Throughout the interview, indications of disloyalty may arise. The interviewer should listen and estimate spontaneous negative comments, especially if these are unjustified or do not take into account the positions of both parties. This does not entail negative ratings when someone has reacted to what they perceive to be wrongs, but only if they are not thought through or only take account of self-interest or a limited viewpoint. The ratings should then be based on how the issue is pushed. Positive ratings are based on criticisms made with understanding of the different perspectives, objectively and in the right forum.*

**SERVICE-ORIENTED.** Is calm, attentive and friendly in his or her interaction. Has an interest, willingness and ability to help others and makes efforts to provide solutions.

– In what contexts do you need to help or support others? How much of your work involves this? How do you perceive these situations?

– Tell us about when someone last came and needed help. What were the circumstances? What was it about? What did you do? What did it lead to?

– Have you experienced having someone set unreasonable demands on you in this context? What was it about? What did you do? What did it lead to?

– Have you ever lost your temper or become irritated? Tell us about this time. What was it about? How did you handle it? How did it go?

*Positive ratings are supported by the person seeing it as part of their role to provide service to others and have a positive attitude towards this. This will be subject to convincing concrete examples of actual support or assistance offered, and the ability to deliver good service and deal with difficult people without their own emotions being reflected in a way that adversely affects the long-term objectives.*

**CONVINCING.** Is good at influencing and convincing. Gets people to change their opinion or behaviour.

– In what situations at work do you need to convince or influence others?

– Describe when you last managed to convince someone about something that was important to you. How did you go about it? Is that what you usually do?

– When did you last try to affect a group in a particular issue? What was it about? What did you do? How did it go?

– In what situations are you responsible for negotiating? Tell us about a specific situation – how did you go about it? How did it go?

– Is there anything you want to get better at here? What do you do to accomplish that? Can you give an example?

– Tell us about a time when you haven't got anything you wanted. What was it about? How did you try to influence the matter? What made it go as it did?

*Positive ratings are based on concrete examples of situations where the applicant has influenced or convinced others and achieved concrete results. These are strengthened if situations have been demanding or if the issues when the applicant has been able to influence or convince others were crucial. Consideration should also be taken of whether the applicant's approach can be considered well adapted to the situation.*

**CULTURAL AWARENESS.** Values differences and understands how background, culture and group affiliation affect him- or herself and others. Has the ability to include this in the calculation when decisions are made and the approach is chosen.

– Do you have contact with people from other cultures in your working life? In your life in general? Have you had it before? Do you have contact with other groups or subcultures (e.g. gay culture or youth culture)? Have you had it before? To what extent and in what way? What did you learn from it?

– Tell us about a situation where cultural differences were prominent in a work situation. What was it about? What did you do? How did it go?

– Has your experience of this ever affected your actions? What happened? What did you do? What did it lead to?

– Has it at some point affected a decision? What was it about? How did you think about it at the time? How do you think about it afterwards? Have you been able to apply these lessons learned in any context?

– Has it happened that you yourself belonged to the minority or been on the outside in any context? How did you feel about it? How did you act in that situation? What did it lead to?

*Positive ratings are based on knowledge and awareness of differences, a positive attitude towards them and understanding that differences can enrich, as well as concrete indications that the person can adapt his or her own actions to collaborate smoothly with different kinds of people.*

**LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

**LEADERSHIP.** Leads, motivates and empowers others with what is necessary to effectively achieve common goals. Coordinates groups and becomes a point of reference for others. Creates engagement and participation.

– What is your experience of work management? Project management? Staff responsibility?

– Describe an occasion when you coordinated a group's work. What were the circumstances? What did you do? What was the biggest challenge? How did you take it on? What feedback did you get?

– How do you motivate others? Tell us about such a situation. What did you do? How did it go?

– Have you ever had an employee who did not work out? Tell us about that situation. How did you act? What did it lead to?

– Have you ever had a working group that hasn't worked so well? What happened there? What did you do? What did it lead to?

– How do you work with developing others? How do you follow up? Does that usually work? Tell us about a situation when it worked out less well?

*This competence can be difficult to rate for those who lack formal managerial experience. The interviewer should then be cautious and look at the conditions, rather than the actual performance. For those with some or extensive experience, positive ratings are based on concrete indications of awareness, responsiveness and proactive behaviour that have produced good results.*

**CLEAR.** Communicates in a clear manner. Ensures that messages reach out and that expectations are clear for all parties concerned. Reminds and follows up.

– Are there situations where you need to explain complex things to others? Tell us about such a situation. What were the circumstances? How did you go about it? How did it go? How do you know you achieved this result?

– How do you make sure your message hit home? Can you describe a concrete situation? Did it work?

– What do you do so that the message will not be forgotten? Can you give an example? How did it work?

*Note how the applicant communicates in the interview situation and whether he or she is clear in his or her thoughts and presentation. Positive ratings are based on whether one as a listener experiences stability and consistency in the communication, if the applicant emphasises a clear message and if the conclusions of different reasoning emerge. Direct observations are an absolute requirement, but they are strengthened if the applicant can give concrete examples of situations in which he or she has managed to convey complex messages, ensured that messages hit home and reminded or followed up in an effective manner.*

**PROFESSIONAL.** Understands and applies business principles. Focuses on costs, revenues, profits, markets and what can provide the highest returns.

– What are your experiences of business thinking? How have you applied it in practice? Can you give a concrete example? What was the result?

– Have you found any way to increase revenue? Did it work in practice?

– Have you found new business opportunities? How did you come up with that idea? Have you had the opportunity to put it into practice? Are there other ideas?

– Have you generated any suggestions for reducing costs? Tell us about this. Did you implement it?

*Positive ratings are based on an understanding of business principles that the applicant expresses and concrete examples of how this can be put to practical use. This is strengthened by spontaneous comments the applicant makes about business thinking in other parts of the interview.*

**STRATEGIC.** Thinks strategically and has a broad perspective on issues. Looks at the long-term importance of things and broader consequences and adapts his or her actions accordingly.

– In what way do you think strategically or tactically? Do you think about your own work or the organisation as a whole? Can you give a concrete example?

– Has this generated any concrete proposal on your part? How did you get the idea? Have you presented it to the organization? Have you put it into practice? What was the result?

– What time perspective do you have when you think about your work? How would you structure your strategy for the future if it was you who decided?

– What are the main challenges in your industry in a shorter perspective? In a longer perspective? How do you think you should respond to them?

*Positive ratings are mainly based on whether the applicant has the ability to reason around issues with a long-term perspective and take into account many different factors. This is partly linked to analytical ability, the ability to move between the conceptual and the concrete and the clarity of the thought processes, but it is crucial where the applicant applies his or her ability and attention. The positive rating is strengthened if the applicant spontaneously touches on this kind of reasoning. Consideration must be given to the scope for long-term thinking that exists provided the applicant's industry and role, but also to the fact that there is always room to think long-term about one’s own professional development for example.*

**JUDGEMENT.** Makes correct trade-offs and priorities. Weighs up complex information and different types of considerations and shows judgement in statements, actions and decisions.

– Tell us about a situation when you have been faced with a difficult balance. What was it about? How did you reason? Did you gather any additional information? Did you consult others? How did you reason? What did this lead to?

– Tell us about another difficult situation when a complex decision was made. How did you go about it? How did you reason? How did it go?

– Have you ever made a wrong decision on an important issue? What was it about? How did you think about it at the time? What made it wrong? How do you see it now in retrospect?

*Weigh in the results of the analytical tests here, but ensure that the applicant has a reflective and analytical approach and that he or she actually uses his or her abilities. Note If there are good examples of accurate analyses and if other examples indicate inadequate analysis. These examples may both come from the questions above and from the applicant's biographical interview, and the latter may not be underestimated or disregarded.*

**DETERMINED.** Makes decisions quickly and acts on them, despite limited information or difficult circumstances. Shows judgement under time pressure.

– What kind of decisions do you make in your work? Are they fast or do you have time to think about them?

– Can you tell us about an occasion when you had to make a quick decision? What was it about? How did you go about it? Did it go well?

– Can you tell us about an occasion when you had a more crucial decision to make? What was it about? What did you do? How did it go?

– Have you ever made a decision that did not turn out so well? How did you think about it at the time? What did it result in? How do you think about it now afterwards?

*Here the interviewer must take a position on the degree of difficulty and time pressure in decision-making, and it is also possible to consider decision-making that has arisen in connection with the background interview. Positive ratings are made when there are concrete indications that the person has the ability to arrive at a decision even in the case of major issues and the information is limited, and that this is done in a fair balance against risks and with predominantly good results.*

**INTELLECTUAL SKILLS**

**STRUCTURED.** Plans, organises and prioritises the work effectively. Sets up and keeps the time limits.

– In what way do you need to plan and organise as part of your work today? How do you arrange it? Do you think it works well? Can you tell us about an occasion when it really worked well?

– Tell us about an occasion when you had a lot to do. How did you go about it? How did it go?

– What time frames do you work against? How do you think it works to keep them?

– Can you tell us about an opportunity when they couldn't be kept? What happened? How did it turn out?

– Has it ever happened that your planning completely failed? Why did it happen? How did it feel?

*Ratings can often be based on both direct and indirect observations, where positive indications are about well-balanced planning, order and methodology that work even when it is pressured and the person demonstrates a good ability to prioritise the right things.*

**QUALITY AWARENESS.** Is thorough and well aware of goals and quality standards. Places great emphasis on living up to these.

– What does quality thinking mean to you? What does it mean in practice? What do you have to do to live up to this?

– Have you ever had a hard time living up to this? Why did it happen? How did it turn out?

– Have you ever had to compromise on quality to keep the time? Why did it happen? How did you handle it? How did it go? What did you learn from it?

*Weigh up if the person has an understanding of quality thinking and prioritises this and whether there are concrete indications that it affects his or her working methods with a proper balance between time and quality for the task.*

**CREATIVE.** Often comes with ideas and new approaches to work-related issues. Has an innovative thinking that can be put into practice and leads to results.

– In what context can you come up with new solutions or ideas? Tell us about such a situation. What did you get your idea from? How did it go?

– Tell us about a situation when you came up with something you think is very good. In what way was your proposal new? Have you had the opportunity to realise it?

– Tell us about a situation when you questioned something that was generally accepted? What was it about? How did you think about it at the time? Where did you get your thoughts from? What did it lead to?

*Positive ratings are based solely on concrete examples of the ideas that the person him- or herself had or contributed to that led to actual results.*

**SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE.** Understands the professional aspects of the work particularly well. Continually maintains his or her specialist knowledge. Is a knowledge resource for others.

– Describe your professional expertise in your own words. Is this included in your general practice or is it a bit out of the ordinary? What kind of problems does your specialist knowledge help you solve?

– How do you keep abreast of what is happening in your area? Do you think it's enough to keep up? Are there other ways for you to maintain your specialist knowledge?

– Are your colleagues usually asking you for advice or information? What does this usually apply to? Can you give an example? Could you answer that question? What do you do when you don't know the answers?

*Positive ratings are made when the person attaches importance to their knowledge development to a greater extent than most others and that this has led to the person having more to offer their customers/contacts, or that there are indications that others are using her or him to get knowledge or inspiration.*

**PROBLEM-SOLVING ANALYTICAL SKILLS.** Works well with complex issues. Analyses and breaks down problems into their constituents and solves complex problems.

– What kind of information do you need to analyse in your current work? What sort of decisions can your analyses lead to?

– When did you last need to analyse a larger amount of information? What was it about? How did you go about it?

– What is the most complex problem you are wrestling with right now? How do you arrive at a decision in this issue? Where do you collect information? What analysis do you do?

– What do you see as your strength in these contexts? Can you give an example? What is your weakness? Can you give an example?

*Positive ratings are based on the applicant handling complex issues and problems. Consideration must also be given to the results of analytical tests, which largely create the conditions for this competence.*

**NUMERICAL ANALYTICAL ABILITY.** Understands numerical data. Performs numerical tasks quickly and accurately.

*Best evaluated through occupational psychology tests that focus on numerical analytical ability.*

**LINGUISTIC ANALYTICAL SKILLS.** Understands complicated linguistic documentation, both spoken and written. Produces his or her own high-quality documents.

*Best evaluated through occupational psychology tests or simulation exercises that focus on linguistic analytical skills.*

**Sources:**

*Competence-based Personnel Strategy, 2008. Authors: Malin Lindelöw, trained psychotherapist, Doctor of Psychology*